



Department of Justice

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THREE PLEAD GUILTY TO MANUFACTURING MARIJUANA;
THREE OTHERS EXPECTED TO PLEAD GUILTY THIS WEEK

*Defendants Arrested Following Discovery of Grow Operation
in National Forest in Northern Wisconsin*

Madison, Wis. - John W. Vaudreuil, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, announced that Jorge Lopez-Ontiveros, 24, and Abraham Ramirez, 29, citizens of Mexico, pleaded guilty yesterday in U.S. District Court in Madison to charges of conspiring to manufacture marijuana. Cesar Tinoco, 21, also of Mexico, pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charge on November 23, 2011. All three men, as well as three additional co-conspirators who are scheduled to plead later this week, were apprehended in connection with a grow operation of over 9,000 marijuana plants in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest located about six miles south of Clam Lake, Wis.

U.S. District Judge Barbara B. Crabb scheduled sentencing for Tinoco on January 31, Ramirez on February 1, and Lopez-Ontiveros on February 2, 2012. Each of the defendants face a mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison and a maximum of life.

During the plea hearings, Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert A. Anderson described how Tinoco, Ramirez and Lopez Ontiveros were apprehended in early August along with Jose Esqueda-Garcia, 19, of Mexico, Moises Lopez-Ontiveros, 21, of Mexico, and Norberto Burciaga, 40, of St. Paul, Minn., after the marijuana grow was raided by over 200 law enforcement officers from over a dozen different local, state and federal agencies.

The grow location had initially been discovered in November 2010 by hunters who reported the find to police. Police monitored the area in 2011 to determine if persons involved in the grow would return to use the area again. After months of monitoring and surveillance, law enforcement officers from the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation; Ashland County Sheriff's Department;

Drug Enforcement Administration; U.S. Forest Service; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources; Northwest Area Crime Unit (comprised of Sawyer, Douglas and Washburn County Sheriffs' Departments and Superior Police Department); U.S. Customs and Border Protection; and Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission raided the campsite of the suspected growers and seized over 9,000 marijuana plants that were being grown and tended by the men.

Four of the five men at the camp eluded capture until the following day when Burciaga arrived from Minnesota to pick them up. Sawyer County deputies observed the Burciaga truck and stopped it as it headed back toward Minnesota, apprehending four of the suspects who had fled and stayed in the forest overnight.

United States Attorney Vaudreuil stated, "The message from these prosecutions should be very clear: if you use public land for a marijuana manufacturing business, be prepared to serve very long sentences in federal prison."

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